



# Al-Risala 1988

May

## A Story of Outstanding Success

*There are two arenas in which Indian Muslims are capable of working. One is that of demands and protests. The other is that of hard work and conscientious striving. While Muslim leaders have chosen the first arena, sterling individuals such as Amir Subhani have chosen the second.*

Approximately 94,000 candidates from all over India sat for the preliminary test in the Civil Service examinations for the year 1986-87. Of these, a mere ten thousand proved themselves fit to take the main written examination, on the basis of which only seventeen hundred candidates were selected for an interview. After this final screening process, the number of candidates chosen for high ranking national posts was whittled right down to 855.

The final results of these examinations were published in the national newspapers on Jun 8, 1987. Members of the public could then see with their own eyes, that after surmounting the various hurdles in this rigorous series of high-level, nation wide examinations, the man who finally topped the list was one Amir Subhani – a Muslim. This event in itself is quite adequate proof that there is no dearth of opportunities for Indian Muslims to prove their mettle and to be outstanding successes. Their way is not barred, as is so often alleged, by prejudice or partiality.

Muslims constitute approximately 12% of this country's total population. In strict ratio, Muslims should have numbered at least 100 out of the 855 who were finally selected for senior postings, but, in the final list there were only eleven. The idea generally prevalent among Muslims is that this scanty representation is the result of prejudice, but a closer scrutiny of the procedures of Civil Service Examinations shows that there is really no justification for this claim.

To begin with, the answer papers in the Civil Service written examination do not bear the candidates' names, but only code-numbers. In this way, the examiner has no means of knowing to which community the candidates belong. After the written examination, an interview is conducted by a special board of five to seven members, each of whom is an expert in his or her own field. If it were true that these members were bigoted in their outlook, then surely no Muslim would ever be selected at all for the I.A.S., let alone be allowed to go ahead and bag the top place. Even supposing there were some slight degree of prejudice in the examiners' minds, this would not be the deciding factor in the selection process.

This is thanks to the system of allotting 1800 marks to the written examination and only 250 to the interview. This weightage rules out any foul play. Even if a candidate is unfairly treated at the interview, he still stands an excellent chance of being selected if he has had good marks in the written examination,

because it is the aggregate that counts. No candidate is ever selected or rejected solely on the basis of the interview.

It is heartening to know that while Amir Subhani's marks in the written examination only came to 64%, in the interview he managed to obtain 74% – a clear 10% improvement on his showing in the written examination.

When asked how he had prepared for the Civil Service examinations, Mr. Subhani said that, for six months prior to the examination, he had studied for twelve to fourteen hours a day. Even before this, he had been in the habit of studying up till midnight. Another important point he made was that he had done extensive extra-curricular reading of books, periodicals and newspapers, as well as concentrating on the required reading for his course.

If Amir Subhani had an outstanding success it was entirely due to the extraordinary amount of effort that he put into his work. In every examination that he had sat right throughout his life, from his matriculation right up to M.A., it was always his own strenuous efforts which had secured him high marks. When he was asked what advice he would give to potential I.A.S. candidates, he said that on the basis of his own experience, the best thing to do was "work hard and never give up in your struggle to achieve your goal."

There are two arenas in which Indian Muslims are capable of working. One is that of demands and protests. The other is that of hard work and conscientious striving. While Muslim leaders have chosen the first arena, sterling individuals such as Amir Subhani have chosen the second.

Over the last half-century, Muslim leaders have seen fit to follow a policy of confrontation. Blaming others for all their difficulties, they have embarked on an unending protest campaign. People like Amir Subhani, however, have not in the meanwhile wasted their time in pointing the finger of accusation at others. Instead, they have set themselves to constant hard work in order to improve their positions, neglecting no opportunity which should happen to come their way.

This latter method has proved by far the more successful. While the policy adopted by Muslim leaders has failed to produce any positive results, those who have striven in the manner of Amir Subhani have gone from strength to strength. Their efforts have never gone to waste. Sooner or later they have borne fruit. Sooner or later they have led to success.

Which approach then should Muslims adopt? Clearly, they should, follow the trail blazed by Amir Subhani, for such is the path which will lead them to success. The path which their leaders are so anxious to show them should be shunned absolutely, for it is a path that will lead them nowhere.

4 May 1988

## Whatever happens is the will of God

When certain people offered to guard Ali (the fourth Caliph), the son of Abu Talib, the latter replied, "Destiny is man's guardian." According to another tradition, he said, "No man will taste the joy of faith until he realizes that he could never have escaped what has befallen him, nor enjoyed what escaped him."

*(Abu Dawood)*

4 May 1988

## Remaining steadfast in the face of persecution

During the Abbasid Caliphate the emergence of the Mutazilite creed stirred up controversy among Muslims, as a result of which Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal had severe punishments inflicted upon him. Yet he refused to alter the position he had adopted. Hafiz ibn Hajar tells that he was beaten so severely as to make "even an elephant flee."

## Our World—God's Country

*God sent His Prophets to the world. The Prophets showed man quite plainly, in terms which he could not misunderstand, exactly what was required of him by his Lord: they clearly defined the divine scheme according to which man was to conduct himself.*

On an extended tour of the U.S.S.R., an American lady once pointedly registered her dislike and disapproval of the portraits of the Communist Party Chairman which she saw hanging everywhere she went. A travelling companion immediately pointed out to her in an undertone that she was in Russia now, not America.

In one's own country, one behaves automatically with discretion, because adherence to customs, laws and norms of polite behaviour has become instinctive long before adulthood. But in a foreign country, one is often initially unaware of differences in tradition and etiquette, and must take care to familiarize oneself with their minutiae before embarking on social relationships or even entering into the practical matters of everyday living. This means being constantly on the alert to prevent instinctive behaviour – correct in the home environment, but incorrect in a foreign context – from giving undue offence. When foreign visitors remember to remove their shoes before entering a mosque, they show their awareness of a custom which is alien to them, and their willingness to respect it. As Europeans would say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

The same is true in a broader sense of men in his world environment. Born as he was into a world which, not he, but God created, he must learn the rules of that 'foreign' land, and, once having learned them, must respect and obey them. He must always remember that he is living not in a world of his own making, but in the world of God.

If man lives his life according to God's scheme of things, he is bound to prosper. But if he does not, he will be looked upon as a rebel and will be liable for punishment by his Maker. It is not only punishment that he risks, but the withdrawal of God's blessings for all time to come.

How should man live in this world if he is to conform religiously to the will of God? It was to answer this question that God sent His Prophets to the world. The Prophets showed man quite plainly, in terms which he could not misunderstand, exactly what was required of him by his Lord: they clearly defined the divine scheme according to which man was to conduct himself.

This prophetic guidance has been enshrined for all eternity in the Quran. Whoever wishes to be counted among God's faithful servants, and granted a share in His eternal blessings, must read the Quran and be guided by it throughout his entire life.

6 May 1988

## Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions: "Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?" "Do tell us," the Companions replied, "It is remembrance of God," said the Prophet.

(*Tirmidhi*)

6 May 1988

### **Those who show mercy will be dealt with mercifully**

"The Merciful One shows mercy to the merciful," said the Prophet. "Be merciful with those on earth. The One in Heaven will be merciful with you."

(Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi)

6 May 1988

## In order to enter the eternal abode of peace, one must live peacefully on earth

Abu Huraira asked the Prophet to tell him what he could do to be sure of entering heaven. "Spread the word of peace, extend hospitality, cultivate close relationship and stay up at night, when others are asleep; you will enter heaven in peace." the Prophet told him.

## Appearance and Reality

Appearance veils reality. In this world, man is put to the test of recognizing appearance for what it is, and of penetrating it in order to reach the reality hidden beyond it. If he is to be successful, he must refrain from becoming obsessed with appearances, must rise above the level of the seen, and pass beyond to that of the unseen. There, on this higher plane, the hidden realities of life will stand out clearly before his gaze.

How does one free oneself from obsession with appearances? It means, primarily, looking at things in an entirely different way. For example, it means recognizing that something which is ostensibly a purchasable item is actually a gift from God; it means having a grasp of the fact that the wares of the market place have come not just from the hands of the craftsman or the assembly line of a factory, but from the treasure house of the universe. Faith in the unseen means the realization that the things which we seem to receive from the hands of men come, in actuality, from the hands of God. It is only those who are at one with their Maker, who can attain this degree of finely tuned perception.

In this world, we have the option of living like the blind, or of living with our eyes wide open. The test we are set in the present world forces us to make this choice. One who remains blind to the realities of this world of trial will, thanks to his blindness, be stranded in the world to come. On the other hand, one who lives with his eyes open to the divine truth in this world will be blessed with heavenly vision in the land beyond the grave. There, all the blessings of the world – and even more – will be given to him for all eternity.

The 'blind' man, sitting at the dining table, will look upon the milk, meat, fruit, vegetables, etc. as items which have been bought from vendors, and then brought to me and prepared for him so that his palate and hunger may be satisfied. Content with this thought, or even not thinking about his food at all, he eats his fill, and then is off on his way to some other activity, without having acknowledged, even for a second, that the eatables he consumed were actually gifts from God. He simply cannot see that they are some of nature's greatest masterpieces. He does not give a single thought to the long and infinitely complex development of the entire universe which made it possible for such things to come into existence.

The man who has his eyes open to the truth thinks in quite a different way, when the same set of eatables is set before him. He is intensely aware at all times that these are the products of nature's 'factory.' He reflects upon how cows and buffaloes eat grass and then convert it into meat and milk. He thinks of how the tree takes in water and nutrients from the soil and then converts them into flowers and fruit. When he ponders upon how such 'factories' could come into existence, the system of the entire universe begins to unfold itself before him. He considers how it was only after this limitless universe had

revolved for millions and millions of years that the system of the present world could be established. The present world, vast and varied as it may seem, accord with it in every detail. It is only because this is so that the tree can yield fruit and the cow can give milk.

When he thinks all this, he experiences a strange kind of thrill, and a sense of wonder and awe. Then when he drinks milk, or puts a piece of meat or fruit into his mouth, he feels that it is a unique blessing from God.

It is obvious that eating, as a normal human activity is not the same for the 'blind' as it is for the 'seeing'. Neither can the consequences be the same for both, as is suggested by the analogy the *Quran* gives us of the man who eats stones and the man who eats fruits: just as the effects of eating can never be the same for these two men, so can the consequences never be similar for one who eats 'blindly' and one who eats 'with his eyes open.' Hell is the ultimate destination of those who are blind to the divine truth, while heaven will be the eternal abode of those who have the eyes to see it. In the Hereafter, that which we receive shall be in direct proportion to what we have discerned behind the veil of appearances – neither more nor less. Those who have never torn that veil aside can expect to receive nothing.

8 May 1988

## Avoiding Anger

Abu Hurairah tells of how a man came before the Prophet and asked him for some advice. "Do not be angry," said the Prophet. He asked for further advice, a second and a third time and each time the Prophet repeated the words, "Do not be angry".

9 May 1988

## Prayer in the True Sense

*If a man's prayer does not fend off indecency and evil, then his prayer is not true prayer.*

– Hadith

What does it mean to offer up a prayer? It means to give serious thought to our lives being scrutinized by an all-seeing Deity, and to ward off all indecency and evil with words of submission to and praise of God. Steadfastness and regularity in saying one's prayers are enjoined by the Quran, but the Prophet cautions that "if a man's prayer does not fend off indecency and evil, then his prayer is not true prayer."

True prayer demands that all one's mind and heart be given to it. If one's prayer is bereft of spirit, it is no better than an empty ritual, a mechanical series of mouthings which bears no relation either to real life or to genuine piety. Such lip service to the outward forms of religion will certainly not protect one from falling into the ways of evil.

It is just like a son claiming great respect for his parents, but allowing them to toil unceasingly without once offering them help. Or the brother who claims great affection for his sister, but who allows her to go hungry while he himself eats up every last morsel. Or the man who swears himself to lifelong friendship, but who shrugs his shoulders and turns his back the moment his friend is in dire distress. Just as none of these people are sincere in what they profess, so is the man who mouths pious words with his mind elsewhere a hollow impostor in the eyes of God.

It should always be remembered that whatever one recites in prayer is a covenant before God that one will keep His commandments. It should never then be possible to step out of the mosque after prayers and immediately begin treating others with callousness and arrogance. Since the very act of praying is a manifestation of one's heart being full of fear and love of God, how can one behave as if one had never heard of such sentiments the moment one leaves the hallowed atmosphere of the mosque and re-enters the life of the everyday world? Prayer which does not prevent such undesirable and mean-spirited conduct is soulless and without value. In fact, it is not prayer in the true sense of the word at all.

10 May 1988

## Tackling the Root Cause

I recently had a talk with a Hakim, an expert in the *unani* system of medicine, during which we discussed the respective merits of the *unani* and allopathic systems. The Hakim pointed out that the fundamental difference between the two was that whereas the allopathic system concerns itself with removing only the symptoms of a complaint, the *unani* system attacks the root cause. To illustrate his point, he cited the allopathic doctor who gives aspirin, or some other such pain-killer, for a headache. This provides only temporary relief, for it does not remove the source of the pain. The *unani* physician, on the other hand, would first look into the cause of the headache perhaps some disorder in the digestive system – then he would set about treating that, and not just the headache. He would never aim at giving just temporary relief. The Hakim Sahib was, therefore, severely critical of the allopathic method, while he described the *unani* system as both reasonable and natural, having as its objective a permanent cure.

Later, in the discussion, the subject of *Al-Risala* came up. The Hakim Sahib said that he could not agree that its message was truly constructive. He argued that it needed to provide instant solutions to the critical problems besetting Muslims today. "But", he said, "you do not have any quick solutions for these problems. All you offer your readers is a philosophy, or a code of conduct – patience, avoidance of confrontation unilateral withdrawal of complaints. Under the present conditions, it is not an all-embracing philosophy which they need, but solutions for individual problems."

I said to the Hakim: "As far as individual maladies are concerned, the science you have learned as a healer tells you that the cause must be removed if the treatment is to be beneficial. You could call this a philosophy too. And it is one which you would certainly not give up in favour of a patchwork treatment of symptoms. When it comes to social maladies, however, you pronounce yourself in favour of the piecemeal removal of symptoms, leaving the cause untouched: If you were to apply the same standards to social ills as you do to physical ills, you would see that it is just as essential to remove the cause in the former as it is in the latter. The symptoms of social malaise will disappear only when we have a philosophy which tackles the root cause.

11 May 1988

## Taking Our Inheritance for Granted

*Today there are many millions of people who regard themselves as religious, without religion playing any active part in their lives; it is simply not the focal point in their thinking or their actions. It is not, therefore, possible for them to become zealous proponents of religion.*

Many scientists, born into Christian or Jewish families, have remained religiously inclined to the ends of their lives. One such example was Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) who, a regular church-goer, was a religious man in every sense of the word. But he, like his scientific confreres, was known to the world as a scientist, and not as a man of religion.

Why is it that science should take precedence over religion in the composite image projected to the public? The main reason is that religion, being an inheritance from the ancestral past, tends to be taken for granted and, therefore, pushed into the background. Science, on the other hand, tends to come to the fore because it is a matter of great attainment after prolonged and intensive effort – a matter of making great and important discoveries one after another. A man's inherited religion tends to mean ritual performance, whereas science is a matter of questing, of broadening the intellectual horizons and of making forays into the unknown. It means delving into mysteries and then sharing the results with the entire world. It is difficult to develop "any great enthusiasm for something which comes to one as a matter of inheritance, but something which is a matter of discovery, on the other hand, can become one's most cherished possession.

Today there are many millions of people who regard themselves as religious, without religion playing any active part in their lives; it is simply not the focal point in their thinking or their actions. It is not, therefore, possible for them to become zealous proponents of religion. They are not even in the same class as scientists, who are constantly seeking after knowledge. They are simply people who have allowed themselves to stagnate in religious matters because they have received their religion as a legacy, and not as a result of their own personal discovery. They are like so many "Newtons" who ostensibly believe in one religion or the other, while devoting their energies and enthusiasm to anything but religion.

## Superior Strategy

*When God has given us so many examples in nature of the necessity for patience, precaution and a circumspect approach, why is it that we still unthinkingly use demonstrably wrong tactics, act in haste, and fail to gauge the baneful results of our actions?*

When a man wishes to take possession of a beautiful rose, he may succeed if he rushes at it, seizes it by the stem and, with a mighty heave, tears it up by the roots. He will then have his rose, with half the petals missing, his hands will be torn and bleeding and, of course, the rose bush will never produce lovely blossoms again. Clearly, that is not the way to set about it. Obviously, he should protect his hands from, the thorns, neatly snip off the stem with a pair of garden scissors, avoid doing damage to the plant, and see that his clothing does not become entangled in the bush. Anyone who has once had a bad experience trying to gather roses will obviously take all the necessary precautions on subsequent occasions. And he will have his lovely bouquet of roses, intact.

But it is astonishing how people fail to apply this God-given lesson to other situations in life. They understand that they are faced by certain problems, and they also understand the thorny nature of those problems, but they rush head-on at them, and try to grapple with them in the way of the man who mindlessly lacerates his own hands on the thorns of the rose. They allow themselves to become entangled, and they can see quite well that their own activities are verging on the destructive, yet they still feel that the "rose" is within their grasp, and that there is no turning back until they can triumphantly hold it aloft, albeit battered and petal-less.

When God has given us so many examples in nature of the necessity for patience, precaution and a circumspect approach, why is it that we still unthinkingly use demonstrably wrong tactics, act in haste, and fail to gauge the baneful results of our actions? We cannot, for example, achieve positive results by assembling huge crowds, making fiery speeches and issuing provocative statements. When God clearly wishes the reform of individuals and institutions to be carried out through quiet constructive activity, it will serve no useful purpose to launch agitations and create a general uproar.

We must accept the truth that the world we live in was not fashioned by ourselves, but by God. Although we have apparent freedom to act as we will, that freedom has been given to us only for the divine purpose of placing us on trial. The only way then for human beings to succeed in the conflicts of life – for conflict is an inherent aspect of earthly existence – is to cooperate with the divine scheme of things in a spirit of patience, tolerance and accommodation.

13 May 1988

## The Fate of the Hypocrite

A long tradition recorded by Ibn Kathir tells us what man will face after death. One part of it, dealing with a certain manner of man says:

"If the dead man is an unbeliever or a hypocrite, the angels will ask him, 'What do you have to say about the man? (That is, about the Prophet). He will reply, 'I do not know. I only heard something of what was said about him.' Then he will say that he did not try to find out what it was. 'Neither did I follow him, nor did I let myself be guided.' Then a door leading towards heaven will be opened for him and an angel will say, 'This would have been your abode had you believed in your Lord. But when you refused, then God gave you this place instead.' And then a door leading to hell will be opened for him." (Vol. II. P.533).

According to this *Hadith*, it is not only the unbeliever but also the hypocrite who will meet this fate after death. The word hypocrite was used for the first time during the days of the Prophet in Medina. Who were these early hypocrites? They were people who recited the article of faith, who said their *Namaz* and performed all other acts of worship, without true faith having actually found its way into their hearts. When asked to prove their faith by making sacrifices, their refusal, or inability, showed them up in their true colours. They had become Muslims purely as a matter of expediency, and not with genuine, heartfelt zeal.

## The Correct Approach

I once chanced upon a group of Muslims at a place where a minor communal riot had taken place, and found that they were heatedly proclaiming that the Muslims had done nothing whatsoever to provoke the other community, and that the latter had begun fighting for no apparent reason. I counseled patience and asked them to tell me exactly how the fighting had started. It seems that at the spot where the clash took place there is a mosque, with a mandir located close by. When the loudspeaker on the mosque began the call to *azan*, devotees of the other community began to ring the *mandir* bells, as it was also their time of worship. The Muslims asked them to refrain from doing so, but they paid no heed. When the Muslims repeated their request, they took exception to this and a riot broke out.

Then I asked them where it was written in either the *Shariah*, the *Quran* or the *Hadith* that no non-Muslim should ring the bells in his place of worship at the time of *namaz*. Certainly none of our jurists have ever held this to be a law. In fact, never in the entire period Muslim rule did a Muslim ruler ever order that bells should not be rung in a *mandir* or church at the time of prayer. This being so, I asked them why they had become enraged. I did not agree that the sound bells disturbed their prayers. Unfortunately, those concerned did not see the point of my argument and just kept repeating whatever had already been said on the subject. They were not ready to change their ways. I wished they could have been like a friend of mine, who, at crucial moment, suddenly saw the necessity of a different approach. Customarily stern with his children, to the point of driving them away, from him, he entered his home one day to find his young son clinging precariously to the top of a pole which he had managed to clamber on to from an upper balcony. He was trying to detach a kite from the wires. He looked down and saw his father standing there. The boy's eyes went blank with fear. The father, however, sensing immediately how dangerous a rebuke would be, talked gently to his son, and persuaded him to leave the kite and climb carefully back on to the balcony. Had he stormed and shouted at him, the little boy might have lost his grip and had a terrible, even fatal fall.

What is needed now is such a change of approach on the part of Muslims, for their present confrontational ways are quite un-Islamic and they are certainly not the ways shown to us by God and His prophets. They are the ways of the egoists and the lovers of power and prestige. They are such ways as will forever prevent the spreading of the message of Islam, for how can *dawah* work be effectively undertaken when the prevailing atmosphere is one of hatred and suspicion?

Many riots in this country can be traced to a wrong-headed approach to matters which could easily be settled by patient discussion. When a house goes on fire, we put out the fire with water. No one in his right mind would try to put it out with petrol. But that is exactly the kind of approach adopted by the Muslims of today. He rushes at problems, does not try to find the proper solution and adopts an approach which is bound to aggravate the situation beyond all measure.

15 May 1988

### Faith attaches one to God

Bara' ibn Azib reported the Prophet as saying:

The strongest knot of faith is living for the sake of God and animosity for the sake of God."

(Ahmad)

15 May 1988

## Bowing before the commandments of God

There was a family of the Thaqeef tribe of Taif, named Banu Amr ibn Umair, and another from the Banu Makhzoom, named Banu Mughirah who, during the Period of Ignorance (that is, before Islam) used to conduct usurious transactions amongst themselves. After the conquest of Mecca, both families accepted Islam, but, at that time, the Banu Mughirah still owed a certain amount of money to the Banu Amr ibn Umair, who demanded repayment of the debt. The Banu Mughirah conferred amongst themselves and decided that they would pay no interest (on any loans made to them) from the earnings they made after their acceptance of Islam. This naturally caused much dissension. Attab ibn Usayd as a representative of the Prophet in the area, informed the latter of the situation. In reply, the Prophet recited this verse of the Quran: "Believers, have fear of God and waive what is due to you from usury, if your faith be true; or war shall be declared against you by God and His Apostle" (2: 278-279). The attitude of the Banu Amr ibn Umair immediately changed when they heard this verse and they said, "We turn to God and waive the interest still due."

16 May 1988

## Truth Triumphs

At the turn of the century, when the British still ruled in India, an English magistrate once found himself unable to settle a dispute over the ownership of a piece of land adjoining the site for a new mosque. This dispute had been dragging on for years with Muslims insisting that the land belonged to the mosque and Hindus insisting with equal fervour that it was actually the site of an ancient temple. After exhaustive enquiries, the evidence brought before him was still inconclusive, but he finally hit upon the stratagem of asking the Muslims to produce a Hindu who would testify to the land belonging to the mosque, and the Hindus to produce a Muslim who would verify that the land had indeed been the site of a temple. However, in a communal matter such as this, where a loss of prestige was not to be envisaged, and neither side trusted the other to tell the truth, no such witnesses were brought forward. However, in order to reach a final settlement, the Hindus eventually made the proposal that they should consult a holy man of their village, one Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh, the father of Maulana Muzaffar Hussain Kandhelvi, for they did not "expect him to tell a lie."

The magistrate, who was at that time based in a village called Ailum, near Kandhela, promptly summoned the holy man to give evidence in his court. A large number of Hindus and Muslims gathered outside and awaited the final judgement with bated breath. They had it soon enough when Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh averred unhesitatingly that the land belonged to the Hindus.

The Muslims left the court sullen and crestfallen, many of them accusing the Maulana of having disgraced them. Little did they realize that although they had lost the legal battle, they were soon to triumph on a religious issue. It seems that the Hindus were so impressed by the Maulana's lack of prejudice and unwavering honesty, that they began to see Islam in a new light. They began to see that what had given him the moral strength to uphold a right which was prejudicial to the interests of his own co-religionists was, in effect, his religion. As a result, several families in Kandhla accepted Islam at the hand of Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh. One of these families was still living in Kandhla at the time of the partition of India in 1947.

Unfortunately, for similar issues in recent times, no such happy solution has been found, for Muslims continue to show national bias when dealing with non-Muslims, thus effectively alienating the other party. If they were only to put truth first and foremost, God would bless their efforts and turn their worldly defeats into eternal triumphs.

17 May 1988

## Be Prepared

The founder and first ruler of modern Russia, Vladimir Lenin, (1870-1924) received a delegation of Indian freedom fighters in 1919. One whom he met individually was Raja Mahinder Pratap (1886-1979). Rising when the latter entered the room, Lenin himself went to fetch an armchair from a corner of the room, seated his guest in it and then sat next to him on a sofa. Lenin opened the conversation by asking which language he should speak in: English, German, French or Russian. When it had been settled that they should converse in English, Raja Mahinder Pratap offered Lenin a copy of his book *The Religion of Love*. Lenin astounded him by telling him that he had already read it. It seemed that the previous day, when Raja Mahinder Pratap had gone to Lenin's private secretary to make the appointment, he had left a copy with the latter. Lenin explained: "I took it from him and read it during the night in order to familiarize myself with the thinking of the person I was going to meet the next day."

This short interlude made manifest the remarkable qualities of this Russian leader. Natural talent and very hard work had obviously gone into making him a fluent conversationalist in four languages, 'and his alertness, sense of urgency and capacity for assiduous study paved the way to excellent human relationships. All of this required great and unflagging effort. How many of us, after all, would take the trouble to read a whole book overnight just to be able to have better understanding of an unknown foreign visitor? Lenin spared no effort in cultivating his natural gifts, and when opportunities came his way, he was eager to grasp them. This was the streak in him which placed him in the forefront of the world leaders of his time.

These qualities of alertness and tenacity coupled with innate capability are essential to success in any field. And if they are essential in secular matters, they are certainly indispensable in the domain of religion. Those who seek to serve Islam must show the same preparedness and knowledgeability as the Russian leader did in a purely secular context. They must evince the same vigour, determination and desire to understand others, thinking if they are to be successful in furthering the Islamic cause.

## Coming to Maturity: A Re-birth

*"When I put My servant to the test, and he remains patient, uttering never a word of complaint to anyone he meets, I free him from My grip, and put new flesh and blood in him. He then sets about his work with renewed vigour."*

– Hadith Qudsi

The Prophet Muhammad has set down, in a *Hadith Qudsi*, the words of Almighty God: "When I put My servant to the test, and he remains patient, uttering never a word of complaint to anyone he meets, I free him from My grip, and put new flesh and blood in him. He then sets about his work with renewed vigour."

A man's first birth is that which brings him into this world, when he is born of his mother. But there is a 're-birth', a second birth in a man's life, which is brought about by the man himself. Anyone who has not experienced their new birth is just an ordinary human being, subject to all the everyday influences of family and environment, as he goes about his work. On the other hand one who has been born anew, is an ever-progressing, ever-developing human being. The revolution which has taken place within him has made a new man of him.

How is it that a new man of this nature comes into existence? It is in response to the situations which confront a man in life that such an event takes place. In the normal course of existence, one perforce comes face to face with all sorts of adverse circumstances. There are two ways of reacting to them. Either one may fall to complaining and become embittered, or one may display courage and patience at all times, retaining one's mental and emotional poise. In the first case, the habitual complainer becomes such a prey to his own negative sentiments, that he can never proceed beyond this point on the journey of life. He is like the gramophone needle, struck at one place on the record, doomed forever to remain in the same repetitive groove. However, the man who remains patient, and uncomplaining in the face of adversity, does not allow himself to become a prey to hatred or jealousy, and does not, therefore, lose his peace of mind. He may be besieged on all sides by cruelty and oppression, but this does not make him show anger, or even exasperation. For such an individual, un-favourable circumstances are what cast him in a new mould, from which he emerges as a being of a finer temper and of a higher moral calibre. It is by virtue of his patience in the face of adversity that he develops into a fully mature human being.

19 May 1988

## The True Discovery of God

Most of the stars in the heavens are both larger and more radiant than the sun, and have been shining for billions upon billions of years without their reserves of thermal energy showing any signs of being exhausted. How do stars produce such vast amounts of energy? This is a question which was finally answered by the Noble prize-winning astrophysicist, Hans Bethe, after many years of scientific study.

The day that he made his great scientific discovery – he was with his wife in New Mexico. They were out in the desert at night, and the stars shone down brilliantly on the vast open expanse below. His wife, Rose, exclaimed over their exceptional brightness, and Bethe replied, “Do you; realize, just now, you are standing next to the only human being who knows why they shine at all?”

What Hans Bethe knew was only part of the answer. Neither he nor any other astrophysicist, can say, or will ever be able to say, why or how this carbon cycle comes to operate in stars at all. The crux of the matter is something which cannot even be approached by men of science, for it belongs to a realm which lies far beyond the scope of their scientific findings. The truth lies in the domain of the Almighty – the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. It is God Himself who has invested the stars with a lustre which seems almost magical.

It is one of the ironies of our God-created existence, that a scientist should be so emotionally demonstrative when he has discovered how some part of nature works, but not *why*, while the far greater discovery of God and His works should arouse in him no such feelings. True believers in God feel the joy of His discovery, and so boundless is their happiness, that they cannot but share it with others. If, in thinking of God and carrying out religious duties, they experience no such sense of uplift, it means simply that the true discovery of their Maker yet awaits them.

20 May 1988

## Giving the Benefit of the Doubt

"Believers, avoid immoderate suspicion, for in some cases, suspicion is a crime..."

– (Quran), 49:12

The Arabic word for suspicion, *zann*, is broader in its original sense, covering both good and bad opinion. It is, of course, the forming of bad and unfounded opinions that one is cautioned against and, in the case of Muslims, they are certainly encouraged to give each other the benefit of the doubt.

Adverse opinions may legitimately be formed if one has witnessed some actual wrongdoing, this being acceptable according to the Islamic *Shariah*. But, if there is nothing to go on besides surmise and speculation, the only possible opinion one ought to have is a favourable one. If this is not possible, it is better to suspend judgement altogether.

It is never permissible to have a bad opinion of anyone without tangible evidence to support one's assumptions. One has to tread so carefully in this regard, that even when one's suspicions have been strongly aroused, it is better to dismiss them from one's mind, rather than delve into the matter, for, as the Prophet Muhammad says: "When your suspicion is aroused, do not investigate, but pass the matter over."

His Companions took this advice seriously, as is evident from the example of Abdullah ibn Masood. One day, it was mentioned in his presence that wine had been seen dripping from the beard of Waleed ibn Uqbah, another of the Prophet's Companions. Abdullah ibn Masood prevented any further discussion of Waleed's presumed wrongdoing by saying: "We have been forbidden to spy on one another, and are allowed to take one another to task only about matters which come out into the open." In a similar vein, Umer, the second Caliph of Islam, is reported to have said: "with reference to statements made by your Muslim brothers, when it is possible to place a good interpretation upon them, do so. One should always avoid taking them in a bad sense."

## Breaking the Bonds of Time

*The constraints of time can easily be overcome by keenness and drive, but that where these elements are lacking, even the least time-bound of ventures are likely to fail.*

I once knew a part-time employee in a busy institution who was also a sub-editor of an English newspaper. Keen and well educated, he managed to carry out both sets of responsibilities with the utmost efficiency. When asked how he found the time to do so much work, he replied, "Time is nothing but a function of interest."

Performance ratings, based on time and motion studies, have definitely shown that the successful completion of any given task is dependent not so much on the time factor as on interest. Quite simply, it is a man's keenness which is the spur to higher achievement, the time taken to complete a task being actually shortened by the performer's enthusiasm and dedication. If, however, the element of interest is lacking, even the most generous time allowance can prove to be insufficient.

A friend of mine once received an offer of employment from abroad, which meant his leaving India in three weeks' time. Nowadays, foreign travel involves cutting through a great deal of red tape, which can take weeks, or even months. It, therefore, seemed unlikely that he would be able to leave on time, particularly since he did not even have a passport. Yet, in spite of all kinds of obstacles, he managed to complete the required formalities, and boarded his plane as per schedule.

Another friend, who had two whole months before he left on a foreign assignment, wrote from his village to a relative in town, requesting him to make his travel arrangements and to attend to any other formalities. Having despatched a sum of money to cover all likely expenses, he was content to wait in his village while his relative did the needful. He was quite complacent about the whole affair because two months seemed quite long enough for the completion of all formalities. It was this complacency on his part which caused him to miss his chance of going abroad. While he imagined that his relative was taking all the necessary steps, nothing of the sort was happening. Had he subsequently written to him to emphasize the urgency of the situation, had troubled to go to town himself to take some personal interest in his own affairs, he would have been able to leave on time. As it was, he missed one of the great opportunities of his life, because at the crucial moment he showed a lack of interest and enthusiasm.

It is clear from the contrast in the attitude of these two individuals that the constraints of time can easily be overcome by keenness and drive, but that where these elements are lacking, even the least time-bound of ventures are likely to fail.

22 May 1988

### **The Quran is for admonition, not just for recital:**

Aishah, hearing of certain individuals who read the Quran all night, reading it right through once, or even twice in a night, remarked, "What is there in mere recitation? I used to stay up all night with the Prophet and, in his recitations of the Chapter entitled Cow, the chapter entitled Family of Imran and the Chapter entitled Women, whenever he came to a verse which contained a warning, he would pray to God and seek refuge with Him, and whenever he came to a verse bearing good tidings, he would pray to God and express his longing for what was mentioned in the verse."

*(Ahmad)*

22 May 1988

### **Bear hardships with patience, and one's sins will be forgiven in the next world:**

Abu Bakr once recited this verse of the Quran before the Prophet: "He that does evil shall be requited with it. There shall be none to protect or help him." (4:123). "How," he asked, "can things now turn out well for us, since we shall have to pay for the evil that we do?" "May God forgive you, Abu Bakr," the Prophet said, "don't you ever become ill, or feel fatigue or distress? Aren't you sometimes afflicted with hardship? Don't you fall into error now and then?" Abu Bakr said that he did indeed. "This then is the requital of your sins in this world," said the Prophet.

*(Kanz al Ummal)*

23-24 May 1988

## THE SAFE DRIVER

### Road safety is life-safety

*A great deal of friction and unpleasantness in society could be avoided if only we were to realize that there are times when, figuratively speaking, it is better to go into reverse gear, or pull in to the side of the road, or make our way by side lanes, rather than rush ahead on into the traffic. Even when we feel we are in the right, it is better to avoid accidents by adopting evasive tactics.*

A Mr. Mohiuddin Mohammad of Hyderabad has written to us to express his appreciation of how interesting he found the Bombay travelogue published in *Al-Risala* (Urdu) of the 17th October 1986. He writes: "Your travelogue is not only informative, but excellent in its style of narration.... Your meeting with the driver Hira Lal and your queries on his methods of avoiding accidents brought to mind another similar episode.

A certain taxi driver in all his 55 years on the roads had never once had an accident. Giving a lecture on safe driving, he said that it would take him not more than a minute to say what constituted safer driving. It was all very simple, he said. "The only thing to keep in mind while on the road was the belief that every other driver except himself was mad."

We call a man mad if he is incapable of correct thinking and if his behaviour is irrational and unpredictable. In any encounter with a mad man, therefore, it is pointless to expect rationality. It is equally pointless to expect to solve problems by arguing or fighting with him. Solution to such problems lie in evasion, not in contention.

The driver who assumes that all other drivers are out of their minds can only blame their bad driving on this insane streak in them. But since one cannot reason an irrational person out of rashness and negligence, one has to concentrate on driving in such a way oneself that collisions are avoided. One has to be constantly on the look-out for the car in front stopping without giving a signal, the car in the rear suddenly overtaking one on the wrong side, cars speeding from side streets into the main road when there are no suitable gap in the stream traffic, and vehicles hurtling from lane to lane or trespassing on to the wrong side of the road. Even the traffic lights and traffic policemen are no deterrents to the mindless menaces on the roads, so that one has still to be careful when moving with the green light that some lunatic is not rushing towards one at an angle of ninety degrees.

It is a question of being absolutely perfect ourselves while expecting a far lesser degree of perfection in others. This is a philosophy which can be extended to many other spheres of existence. A great deal of friction and unpleasantness in society could be avoided if only we were to realize that there are times

when, figuratively speaking, it is better to go into reverse gear, or pull in to the side of the road, or make our way by side lanes, rather than rush ahead – on into the traffic. Even when we feel we are in the right, it is better to avoid accidents by adopting evasive tactics.

Under ordinary circumstances, people may seem quite normal, but when the question of material advantage arises or there is a threat to one's ego, even the most gentlemanly have been known to resort to ungentlemanly behaviour, and even the sanest of people descend into insanity. In such situations, the only course to follow is that of the taxi driver who was ready to assume the entire burden of correct behaviour without expecting anything at all in the way of decent behaviour from others.

Once when I was on the way from Hyderabad to Mehboobnagar, a bullock suddenly appeared on the road in front of our car. The driver neither cursed the animal nor tried to edge it off the road. He simply braked, stopped, observed its movements until he was certain which way it intended to move and then, giving it a wide berth, without either disturbing the animal or upsetting himself, he sped on his way.

All of life's problems can be solved in this way, provided we are determined to assume responsibility ourselves in the face of others' remain in that position, they are removed from the scene like so many straws blown away by the wind. Such events take place with amazing regularity, but all men think, in their heart of hearts, that they can only happen to others – never to themselves. Everyone imagines that he will remain unscathed even when it is God's will that he should be cast down.

## RELIGION

### Beyond the Limits of Nationalism

*And when We accepted your covenant that you would not slay one another nor drive your people from their habitations; then you confirmed it and you are witnesses thereto. Yet you are the ones who slay your people and drive a group of them from their homes, assisting others against them in a sinful and unjust way; but if they come as captives to you, you redeem them while their very expulsion was unlawful for you. Do you believe in one part of the Scriptures and disbelieve in another?*

Of the Prophecies made by the Prophet Mohammad and recorded in books of *Hadith* literature, several point out that in latter times Muslims would follow the very same paths as the Jews and Christians, that is to say that they would profess Islam by word of mouth but would, in practice, conduct themselves in no better a manner than either the Jews or the Christians. We quote below one such prophecy as recorded by the Imams, Bukhari and Muslim in their compilations of *Hadith*:

It is reported by Abu Saeed al-Khudri that the Prophet said: 'You will follow the ways of those who went before you, foot by foot and yard by yard, to such a degree that; if they entered the hole of a lizard, you would follow them straight in.' 'Oh, Messenger of God,' we asked, 'do you mean the Jews and the Christians?' 'Who else?' replied the Prophet.

Many of these Jewish "ways" have been described in the Quran and are referred to in the following verses of *Surah-al-Baqarah*:

And when We accepted your covenant that you would not slay one another nor drive your people from their habitations; then you confirmed it and you are witnesses thereto. Yet you are the ones who slay your people and drive a group of them from their homes, assisting others against them in a sinful and unjust way; but if they come as captives to you, you redeem them while their very expulsion was unlawful for you. Do you believe in one part of the Scriptures and disbelieve in another? There is no reward for such people except disgrace in this world and On the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to terrible torment; and God is not unaware of what you do. These are the ones who have purchased the life of this world in exchange for the Hereafter. Their punishment shall not be lightened, nor shall they be helped.  
(Quran, 2:84-86)

Let us take a look at the background of the verses. There were two polytheistic tribes, the Aus and the Khazraj, living in ancient Yathrib (Medina). At the same period, three Jewish tribes, the Banu Qainqa, the Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayzah, had settled in and around Medina. The Aus and Khazraj, generally at war with one another, had formed certain alliances to ensure a positive outcome to their hostilities. The

Jewish tribes, unable to remain aloof from these alliances, aligned themselves respectively with the opposing forces. The Banu Qainqa and Banu Nadhir entered into the Khazraj alliance, while the Banu Qurayzah threw in its lot with the Aus. There ensued a situation very similar to that of the present day, with one Muslim country in the Soviet Camp and another in the American Camp or like that which exists in India, where Muslims are to be found both in the ruling Congress Party and in the Opposition, the net result being that Muslims themselves are split into two opposing camps and continue to fight it out amongst themselves.

When one polytheistic alliance of Medina engaged in hostilities with the other, the members of these Jewish tribes joined in on both sides, and then Jews fought Jews, Jews killed Jews, and Jews expelled Jews from their homes. Such action ran directly counter to Jewish law, for the commandments which had been handed down to the Jews by their Prophets stated quite clearly that a Jew was to do no wrong to his Jewish neighbour, being duty-bound to honour his life and property.

When, in this particular situation, the Jews had fought each other, they were quite unmindful of their own Judaic law. But when the fighting was over, and they saw that a number of Jews had been taken captive by the idolators of the Aus and Khazraj, their national pride – albeit tardily – was strongly aroused, and they were quick to remember that their laws bade them ransom fellow-Jews when they had fallen into the hands of Gentiles. To this end, with much pious exhortation, they began collecting donations and, once they had freed their coreligionists, they announced with pride that they had performed this redeeming act in compliance with such-and-such a tenet of Mosaic law.

With regard to the contradictory and inconsistent nature of their behaviour, the Quran pointed out the existence of two important clauses in their law. One made it clear that no Jew should slay another Jew nor expel him from his dwelling. Yet they had been guilty of both these crimes on a massive scale, showing no regard whatsoever for the dictates of their law. The other stated that when a Jew was captured by a Gentile, his release should be secured by paying a ransom. The fact that they acted only on the second clause showed that they were motivated, not by religious fervour, but by nationalism. Had they been imbued with religious fervour, they would have acted in accordance with the first as well as the second clause. Such action is not acceptable to God, for He is concerned with the spirit in which an act is performed and not with any superficial form which it may take.

We may safely generalize in saying that those who choose to remain silent over the rights and wrongs of an issue when the opponents are both of their own community, but – on a similar issue are loud in support of their own side when another community is involved, are little better than Jewish in their behaviour. When the Jews had dealings with one another, they had no qualms about trampling the laws of God underfoot. And worse, this did not arouse any indignation on the part of their leaders, who failed to perceive any threat in this to their Mosaic law. However, the moment a Jew was persecuted by a Gentile, they saw this as a threat to their religion and, citing divine law in support of their action, launched fiery protest movements.

It is regrettable that this same streak is evident in the Muslims of today. They see their own co-religionists indulge in every kind of profanity and injustice, but they behave as if they are quite oblivious of and insensitive to such action. As a result, it has become impossible to launch any movement aimed at correcting the injustices which exist within Muslim society. The Muslims are, nevertheless, highly sensitive when it comes to the wrongdoing of others, and look with favour upon any movement launched in protest against them.

Our leaders, who proclaim with pride that they have brought together hundreds of thousands of Muslims over a single issue, forget that what has assembled such a large crowd is not the quest for justice per se, but the desire to see another community brought low. Were those very same leaders to call on the Muslims to arise against injustices within their own community, I am sure their complacency would soon be shattered. Used to packing huge marquees full of listeners just by reviling another community, these leaders would not even be able to find the funds to erect a marquee, let alone pack it full of people, if, as the subject of their oratory, they chose the injustices within the Muslim community.

Over the last fifty years, countless movements from those of the Muslim League to those of the Personal Law Board – have sprung up amongst the Muslims. At times the great masses of people who joined in these movements reached such colossal proportions that poetic onlookers were moved to write that:

*The earth and the heavens  
Are at sixes and sevens.*

Yet all these movements are ones which have been launched to counter the injustices of others. Not one of them was instigated by an urge to correct injustices within the Muslim community. Incredible as it may seem, the injustices committed by Muslims against Muslims – and such happenings are daily commonplace – are far greater than those committed against them by the adherents of other faiths.

An example worth citing is the treachery of a Muslim who had been put in charge of a building purchased by an Islamic Institute with a view to setting up its own branch there. Betraying the trust that had been placed in him, he had the building registered in his own name by means of a bogus registration certificate. This is a clear case of misappropriation and dishonesty, which soon reached the ears of Muslim leaders. But not one of them considered it necessary to intervene.

Happenings of this sort are daily occurrence in every town and village. Whenever a Muslim has the opportunity, he does not hesitate to lay hands on the property of another Muslim. This is continuing problem, but no Muslim – either from the rank-and-file or from the elite – is ever moved to rectify this state of affairs and ensure that those who are in the right receive what is their due. This notwithstanding, this same Muslim rank-and-file will rise in indignation along with their leaders as soon as they hear, for example, that some non-Muslim has appropriated a building belonging to the Muslim community. Not even sickness can prevent them from joining in a movement launched to protest against such an act, for when the matter involves Muslims and non-Muslims, they cannot abide the slightest

deviation from Islamic law. But, if the issue is between Muslim and Muslim, no matter how heinous the crime according to Islamic law, no indignation is aroused and no need to protest is felt.

It is for this very kind of behaviour that the Jews have been admonished in the Quran. By behaving in like manner, the Muslims are bearing out the prophecy uttered by their Prophet. By remaining silent over the internal affairs of Muslims, and launching campaigns of protest and complaint over issues involving non-Muslims, the Muslims are treading the same path as the Jews. This is a sign that the religion of the Muslims has ceased to be based on principles and has degenerated into an expression of their community interests. It is for this reason that, in the one instance, they are moved to action, whereas in the other, they remain passive. Were their religion been of a principled nature, they would, in both instances feel moved to correct situation. It would not have been solely when their sectarian interests were involved that they took a stand.

The Muslims should realize that God will look with favour upon their protests against the injustices of non-Muslims only when they show themselves equally indignant over the injustices perpetrated by Muslims. In the sight of God, there is no difference between the wrong done by one Muslim to another and that done to a Muslim by a non-Muslim. Both acts are equally abhorrent to Him. To ignore one and condemn the other may suit narrow, sectarian interests, but according to universal, divine law, such action is entirely reprehensible.

29 May 1988

### The eminent should grieve for the lowly:

It happened that a woman of Medina, who used to clean the mosque, passed away. She was black-skinned and mentally deranged and there were few to perform her funeral. Those who came to know it did not think it proper to inform the Prophet. When he finally heard about it, he asked to be informed of the death of any Muslim in future, irrespective of his or her status.